

In order to launch us in September, please read *The Swerve*, by Stephen Greenblatt, as available through your local bookseller or online at a certain monolithic e-commerce outfit. Within the first three days of our work next Fall, we'll have an open-book, open-notes 40-minute writing opportunity (known as an LEQ) for you to demonstrate to me that you've read and considered the significance of this book. As such, I recommend that you take annotate as you read. This assignment is eminently doable – please do it – it is all that I will require of you this summer.

Nonetheless, I highly recommend that you read as much as possible this summer. Please consider reading a daily newspaper, or perhaps watching “Last Week Tonight,” or some other Digiversed method of remaining informed about the events of the modern-day c21st world. (To be clear: the reason we study history is so that we have some background and context for the events of our own times.)

Moreover, serious historians read books unceasingly. Even I, as a not-so-serious-anymore historian, have purchased several big, fat history books that I will consume this summer. Books that I strongly recommend in advance of studying European History, and that are likely to be assigned to you at the university level, include:

*Guns, Germs, and Steel*, by Jared Diamond. (Also, his subsequent books, *Collapse* and *Upheaval*.)

*Animal Farm* and *1984*, by George Orwell. (These books are send-ups of the Bolshevik Revolution and of Stalinism or perhaps of authoritarianism in general.)

*The Communist Manifesto*, by Marx and Engels.

*All Quiet on the Western Front*, Erich Maria Remarque.

*MAUS*, by Art Spiegelman. (Graphic novels about Auschwitz. Chilling, powerful, disturbing.)

If something a little lighter might fit the bill, there's also excellent historical fiction, such as:

*Girl with Pearl Earring*, by Tracy Chevalier.

*Regeneration*, by Pat Barker.

Finally, since it's summer, you might appreciate something pretty offbeat:

*Slaughterhouse Five*, by Kurt Vonnegut.

Please note: you are only required to read *The Swerve*. No worries if other summer plans prevent you from reading more widely.

I look forward to our work together next year.

Mr. H